

Bristol Ageing Better Food Projects: Bristol Meets the World and Talking Tables

Summary of evaluation findings from UWE Bristol

This document provides a **summary of the evaluation findings relating to two BAB food projects: Bristol Meets the World and Talking Tables**. [Click here](#) to read to the full report.

Background

BAB funded 3 projects focused on using food and social eating to reduce loneliness and social isolation. Each of these projects received funding for 2 years.

UWE Bristol evaluated 2 of these projects:

- ▶ **Bristol Meets the World** led by Bristol and Avon Chinese Women's Group provides 'global lunch club' events for people aged 50+ to share meals, recipes, cooking techniques and stories from around the world. The events take place in a range of community venues across the city.
- ▶ **Talking Tables** led by LinkAge Network partnered with three city farms to deliver a series of social cooking and eating programmes. These have been open to anyone aged 50+ and have focused on healthy and freshly prepared meals based on themes such as plot-to-plate, heritage meals and cooking for one.

Key features of both projects

- ▶ **Asset-based**, working in partnership with organisations that are connected to a particular target audience
- ▶ **Role models** for healthy ageing and/or active participation in society
- ▶ Time spent **building local connections** to scope out interest and needs
- ▶ Use of a **community setting** with space to cook and eat together
- ▶ **Regular meal events**, so participants can choose and plan when to attend
- ▶ Continuous learning and adaptation
- ▶ Opportunities for participants to take an **active project role**, rather than acting as passive recipients of a service
- ▶ People (participants or staff) with the **ability to positively influence** one another
- ▶ Embracing **different cultures**, with local cooks sharing food from their heritage
- ▶ Options to combine with other **health-promoting activities**
- ▶ **Annual celebrations** to celebrate achievements and spread awareness



Evaluation Findings

What role did participants and staff think food played in engaging people?

- ▶ Universal language (9%)
- ▶ Comforting and familiar (7%)
- ▶ Act of love (5%)
- ▶ Connection to the land (5%)
- ▶ Versatile (3%)
- ▶ Good physical health (19%)
- ▶ Connector of issues (18%)
- ▶ Good for mental health (12%)
- ▶ Creative and fun (11%)
- ▶ To be shared (11%)

Evidence from baseline questionnaires showed that the projects reached their target groups in terms of **older people who were more likely than their peers to experience social isolation and loneliness.**

The projects also engaged groups with social needs such as **care responsibilities, long-term health conditions and disabilities.** The participants were **two thirds female**, and **predominantly White or Asian** – with Bristol Meets the World having strong engagement from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups.

The evaluation found that:

- ▶ Participants reported **greater cultural understanding, social interaction and confidence**, as well as making **new friends** and being made aware of **volunteering** opportunities.
- ▶ Participants were able to **shape the service**, which may explain why people grew in confidence and went on to volunteer.
- ▶ Both participants and staff found the whole experience to be **enjoyable.**
- ▶ **Organisational change** has occurred, including improved visibility of partner organisations.

“ Five years ago, if you'd told me I was cooking for a dozen people, I would have thought you were crazy because I just wouldn't have the confidence to do that. ” Participant

“ They're going home and cooking food with their families, inviting families over to cook the food that they've made so their families are benefiting as well ” Delivery partner

Before-and-after questionnaire findings **did not show clear evidence** of participant improvements in health, wellbeing, social isolation, and loneliness. This could be due to a number of reasons found in other research with similar community-based social eating projects, including:

- ▶ The **small number of respondents** (those most vulnerable declined to complete questionnaires).
- ▶ The challenges involved in **creating behavioural change**.
- ▶ The **lack of time** for longer term effects to be measured.

However, these projects helped vulnerable and isolated groups **feel less excluded from community life**, at least in the short-term. These benefits are amplified where participants play an active role in project decision-making as it allows them to build the confidence to connect with others.

This research found that **eating in the company of others can still feel a lonely experience** in instances where there are **language barriers**, which was the experience of some participants in supported housing settings.

This evaluation, alongside the wider research, positions food and community-supported shared meals as **one part of the picture of creating a more connected society**.



Further BAB learning resources can be found at:
<http://bristolageingbetter.org.uk/learning-and-evaluation-hub/>

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